

Sailor Diplomats

www.news.navy.mil

AIH HANDS

MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. NAVY

MAY 2004

Duty in
Europe



▼ **Most of the year** Rota is a quiet fisherman's town. When summer comes around, this small city becomes overpopulated with tourists.

Pearls of the Mediterranean

Rota, Spain

Story by JOC(SW) Dan Smithyman,
photos by PH3 Antoine Themistocleous

Rota, Spain, is known by a lot of names: "Gateway to the Mediterranean," "the Florida of Europe," and is considered by Navy leaders as one of the Pearls of Mediterranean—the others being Naples, Italy, and Sigonella, Sicily.

Located midway between the famous Rock of Gibraltar and the Portuguese border on the Atlantic Ocean, Sailors' attraction to Rota is varied: nine months of sunny weather, travel opportunities, a rich Spanish culture

and the benefits of living and working in a relatively small military community.

"Geographically, this base is really convenient, because you can walk right out the gate and there's somewhere to go, something to do and somewhere to eat," said Kimberly Meza, a Navy spouse and volunteer at Navy Marine Corps Relief Society.

But others like to venture further outside the confines of the naval station.



“We enjoy spending time off base,” said Chief Hospital Corpsman (SW) James VanCleave, who has spent his last three years as the career counselor for U.S. Naval Hospital Rota. “We are in pursuit of those things that are “must sees” like Alhambra, Malaga, Granada, Spain and others. We just got back from London, and we’ve been to Budapest, Hungary, Barcelona, Spain, and other places. This is a good jumping-off point to other destinations in Europe.”

Traveling throughout Spain, and indeed Europe, is not without its challenges. For some, foreign currency is confusing, as are hotels and transportation, but for others, it’s the numerous languages.

“The language barrier can be a challenge. I can’t even count the number of times I’ve ordered off a menu and received something completely different than what I thought, but we just write that up as a cultural experience and try to enjoy whatever it is the waiter brought us,” VanCleave said.

The language barrier notwithstanding, sightseeing and touring the countryside is a favorite pastime among singles and families stationed in Rota. Throughout the year, tourist activities co-mingle with typical Spanish customs. There are bullfighting seasons, religious festivals and sightseeing trips that include castles, cathedrals, flamenco dancing, Roman and Moorish architecture and the running of the bulls. The area is also a principle locale for olive groves and vineyards.

Some people debate whether Spain is better for the service member, or for the children many of them bring along.

“We send a little league baseball team to Poland each year,” said VanCleave. “We also send the high school athletic teams to England and Germany to participant in tournaments. What a fantastic opportunity for our kids to see and do some to the things available here.”

“As a single parent, I like to stay on base

with my three-year-old daughter, Kari,” added Personnelman 2nd Class Jennifer Yee of Personnel Support Detachment Rota. “We like to go to the duck pond, ride bikes and get ice cream at Baskin Robbins. The base has stuff happening year-round. We have fairs, and celebrations, National Night Out, bike rodeos and lots of stuff.”

The conveniences and perks afforded to the 6,000 Americans on base are increasing with Rota’s “Vision 21,” an extensive improvement project to recapitalize the aging infrastructure on base. Some of the projects include a \$19 million security complex, with the consolidation and upgrade of existing security and emergency services facilities; a \$22 million command operations

headquarters; improved transient bachelor enlisted quarters; and a signed memorandum of understanding to begin construction for a new \$32 million Navy Exchange and Commissary mall complex. The Department of Defense Dependents School is also scheduled to open its new state-of-the-art elementary school and some of the new high school facilities in the summer.

This small base, with the neighboring village of Rota, provides an exciting backdrop for single Sailors or families, and offers a unique opportunity for Sailors to grow, both personally and professionally. **SS**

Smithyman is a journalist assigned to the public affairs office, Rota, Spain.



◀ **“I absolutely love** the beaches here in Spain. During the summer it is packed with people, because Rota is totally a summer town and a lot of people spend their vacations here. But my favorite time is at fall and winter, when the beach is deserted. I just find it so peaceful,” said HM3 Katie McKeehan, who is up for orders but wishes that she could stay in Rota.

▶ **LT Kevin Juntunen**, resident officer in charge of construction (ROICC), consults with the project engineering inspector, Ramon Borreguero, about the underway construction of the new elementary school. This is the beginning of what they say is going to be a whole different base by 2010.



ALL HANDS • www.news.navy.mil



▲ **Scenes like these symbolize** the old charm of Europe, where old customs get passed from generation to generation. The pride of good quality work is still more appreciated than mass production.

▼ **Another beautiful sunset** along the coast of southern Spain. Duty in Europe is the perfect setting for romance, adventure, and a chance to experience different cultures that make interesting stories for the people back home.



▼ **Sailors in Naples** are treated with mountain views when looking to sea, such as this view of Mt. Vesuvius overlooking the Gulf of Naples.

Pearls of the Mediterranean

Naples, Italy

Story by JOCS James Slater,
Photos by PH3 Antoine Themistocleous

For centuries, Naples' central location in both Italy and the Mediterranean has made it a center of trade, travel and culture. From ancient times to today, a visit to ancient Pompeii, a row through the blue grotto on the island of Capri or a climb up Mt. Vesuvius have been enticing experiences for visitors. For members of the U.S. military community at Naples, Italy, those "once-in-a-lifetime opportunities are easy weekend trips.

While Naval Support Activity (NSA) Naples has been saddled with a reputation for quality-of-life challenges, these days, all that's changing. With its multi-year improvement project nearing completion, NSA Naples has been resuscitated. *Napoli*, a derivative of the Greek *Neopolis* means "new city;" and Naples—the new city—has a new reputation.

Having moved its activities from its previous location in Agnano's crater, (with its exposed sulfur vent), NSA Naples now boasts an east side locale with a view. Overlooking the city of Naples, NSA now

enjoys a view of Mt. Vesuvius and shares facilities with its new neighbor on Naples' east side, Capodichino airport.

Choices of duty in Naples are plentiful. NSA Naples' facilities support more than 100 tenant commands in the Naples area, supporting missions of U.S. and NATO aircraft, command administration and communication support for the nearly 3,000 people who work at Capodichino.

"It's improved as far as quality of life for the Sailors," said Yeoman 1st Class Jeanice Vitali, who first served a tour of duty in Naples in the early 1990s. "It's just much cleaner and more family-oriented than before. It's a much better place to be stationed now."

Vitali's husband, Cryptologist Technician 3rd Class Jim Vitali, agrees that Naples duty has improved. "It's a lot different now," he said. "I think the driving is better. The police are better—everything like that. They're definitely up to speed to where we are in the United States."

New housing and support facilities have

been built on the edge of the Campania region's farmlands, a 20-minute drive north-east of Capodichino at the U.S. Navy Support Site in Gricignano. With more than 800 units for family housing, the support site is also home to the Department of Defense Dependent Schools elementary and high schools, where children have the opportunity to experience a safe and productive learning environment. The site also houses Naval Hospital Naples and many more support services that offer improved quality of life.

"When I first got here, it was my first duty station, so I didn't know what to expect," said YNSN Kevin Braga, a Naples Security Force member now on year three of his Naples tour. "When I first came here to Gricignano, there was no hospital. There were housing complexes, but it was nowhere near the size it is now. It's beautiful now. It's like paradise. There's a whole new landscape that you can see from miles away. It's the only place in Naples that has this much light [at night]."

▼ **Food is a big part** of any Italian gathering. So the Vitalis make sure to serve typical Italian food like mozzarella along with hot dogs for those with more American tastes when having friends over.



Pearls of the Mediterranean

Naples, Italy

◀ **Basilica di San Francesco di Paola** built by architect Pietro Bianchi in 1817, stands across King Ferdinand's palace, Palazzo Reale. The king asked for this church to be built to complement the view from his suite, because he did not want to be reminded of how the poor lived in the neighborhood behind it.

Central to the support site and the construction project, the Naples Improvement Initiative, a new four-story Navy Lodge greets newcomers to Naples with state-of-the-art facilities and consolidated convenience, alleviating the need to make separate trips to shop at the exchange, the commissary or even process a vehicle.

Soon, shopping, vehicle processing, schools—in fact almost all support services will be within walking distance of one another, as well as the Navy Lodge, an important factor for those transitioning in or out of the community with few transportation options. A regular shuttle

bus connects the support site with all other military facilities in Naples.

The support site was built above an ancient Roman crossroad. Although Italian historical preservation laws forbid the building of structures above such remains, the construction of roads above the Roman roads is permissible. A hand-laid brick walkway now bisects the support site, covering the Roman roadway. A well that provided water to the road's travelers is preserved on the ground floor of what is now Naval Hospital Naples.

In addition to newer, centrally located facilities, the base's educational community

has been able to use new college programs to expand opportunities to pursue a college degree in Naples. Both resident and visiting professors offer flexible programs that make earning a degree on active duty possible. Last year, more than 140 students from the Naples military community earned their degrees, ranging from associates to graduate degrees.

But schooling for adults is not all to weigh when considering education in Naples. Both the elementary and high schools bus students from throughout the Naples and neighboring Gaeta areas. Many families also take the opportunity to enroll their

youngsters in Italian pre-school.

"The key to enjoying a successful tour lies in remembering that living in Italy is not like living in the United States," said Journalist 1st Class Eileen Kelly-Fors. "Housing and apartments are constructed differently; electric power and utilities are different; shopping and driving are different; the pizza and the coffee are different."

Quality-of-life improvements, both in facilities and service, have provided duty in Naples with a new face. That is not to imply that duty in Naples—even with its face-lift—isn't without its challenges.

Language barriers, cultural differences, limited spouse employment opportunities and relative isolation from life and family in the United States are issues shared by many overseas assignments. Additionally, new facilities make it possible to remain

isolated within the American military community. It's possible to work, live and shop entirely on U.S. facilities, but to do so would be to miss rare cross-cultural opportunities that serve a foundation for a successful overseas experience.

For Kelly-Fors, one of the most interesting aspects of a Naples tour are the Neapolitans themselves.

"Neapolitans have a character all their own. They constantly talk using arm and hand movements that animate their conversations and emphasize viewpoints," she said. "You may often feel that you're in the middle of a family quarrel or a comic opera while ordering morning coffee."

"You can't beat it," said Jim Vitale who chose to live off base in the Italian community. "I mean you can see it, and we have the pictures to prove it. Look at how

we are living here. We have our two children here; we have beautiful neighbors and our landlords are awesome."

Braga, who plays in a soccer league with Italian teammates agrees and recommends an attempt at basic Italian as a first step. "The Italians will always help you. If you deal with them and expect them to speak only English, they'll be a little hesitant. When you try to work with them in Italian, they'll help you along.

True to its name, the "new city" of Naples inspires envy in visitors who are not assigned; surprises previously assigned visitors; and extends a welcoming hand to those ready for the unique challenges and rewards of their first assignment in Naples. 🇮🇹

Slater is the managing editor for All Hands.

► **Navy officials in Naples** have worked hard over the last several years to improve sailors' quality of life. Among those improvements was the building of a new naval hospital, replacing the one that rested on Vesuvius' volcanic crater.



► **Children play Europe's** most popular sport, soccer, in the Piazza del Plebisto.



► **Fabio, a Napoli native**, tries to persuade some Italians to come and join him and his American friends. PH3(SW) Lenny Francioni, the one wearing the cowboy hat, likes the attention he gets from the Italians.



▼ **Boats decorated** with multicolored stripes crowd the small harbor of the tiny La Provincia. The little town's piers transform into a lively fish market on Sundays.

Pearls of the Mediterranean

Sigonella, Sicily

Story by JO1 Craig Coleman,
Photos by PH3 Antoine Themistocleous

At Naval Air Station (NAS) Sigonella, Sicily, everything old is new again. The "Hub of the Med," divided into a services and quality-of-life base (NAS I) and an operational base (NAS II), is in the midst of a \$750 million recapitalization project that is making Sigonella an even better place to live and work.

NAS Sigonella seems to be erecting new buildings as quickly as the orange groves that surround the base sprout new trees. The centerpiece of the ongoing construction is the Navy Exchange/DECA commissary and food court. Completed in 2001, the 1,500 square meter facility makes it possible to stock a greater variety of products and foods.

The new dining facility-club offers patrons new lunchtime and after-work entertainment options, while the new administration building relocates previously

scattered customer service offices in a single building. A new chapel and community building improve worship opportunities, and provide a new place for professional and social organization meetings. A new kindergarten was added to the Department of Defense Dependent School (DODDS), and more than 500 new housing units opened recently near NAS II.

"There is construction all over the place," said Thea Burke. Senior Chief Aviation Warfare Systems Operator (AW) Jim Burke, Thea and their two sons arrived 18 months ago, just after the opening of the exchange/commissary complex. "There is transformation going on all the time. The facilities at the school are improving; the roads are constantly being upgraded," added the senior chief.

Pearls of the Mediterranean

Sigonella, Sicily



▲ **All the construction** being done at NAS Sigonella has provided jobs for the local Italians. There are places around the base that are only supported by the Americans who are stationed in Sigonella.

▼ **Even on country roads** outside city limits, you will run into some traffic. Sigonella sheep and goat herders often move their flocks across roads just off the base.



◀ **In Cantania** there are unlimited souvenirs you can buy, but don't forget to do your shopping before or after "siesta time", which is usually mid-afternoon and early evening, where the stores close and locals spend time with family, napping or taking care of personal business.

▼ **New barracks built** at NAS Sigonella, along with many other new facilities, have improved Sailors' quality of life.



The final phase of the recapitalization project is a \$26 million Morale, Welfare and Recreation complex. The facilities, scheduled for completion in 2005, include a multiplex cinema, a heated outdoor swimming pool, a 10-lane bowling center, a video arcade and more.

But base facilities are only part of the story of a tour at Sigonella. The Mediterranean architecture of NAS I and NAS II, with its red tile roofs and pastel walls, is in harmony with the environment and suggests the island's history. You can find everything here, from Baroque opera houses to discotheques, from olive groves to water parks. With 1,000 miles of beaches and a 5,000 ft. volcano—Mt. Etna—looming in the background, Sigonella is a base with sunbathing and skiing nearby, modern amenities and ancient artifacts, plus mild weather and friendly people.

"The spice of life is diversity, and here there's a lot of spice," said Aviation Warfare Systems Operator (NAC) 1st Class Scott Williams, who's been stationed at NAS Sigonella for three years.

As rewarding as a tour in Sicily can be,

it's not without challenges. The first hurdle usually faced by Sailors and their families is the language barrier. But like most barriers, it can be overcome with effort and the proper attitude.

"If you're willing to make mistakes and not get frustrated, they will embrace you as one of their own," said Thea, who does a lot of produce shopping in the local Italian markets. "You have to be willing to make mistakes (with the language). You've got to get up and try again, otherwise you'll find yourself locked in your house—and think of what you'll have missed."

The key to enjoying a tour in Sicily, as anywhere, is the ability to adapt to the environment. "You can't really imagine what it's going to be like before you're here, because it's so different," said Thea.

"We came here to adapt ourselves, to the Italian culture and lifestyle and to enjoy Sicily for what it has to offer," added Jim. "I would tell any Sailor, single or married, get a tour in overseas. It's just so rewarding."

Coleman is a journalist who is assigned to the public affairs office NAS Sigonella, Sicily.

▼ **Two old friends walk** back home from spending time at the old café, where in the middle of the day you would see a gang of old men sitting around talking and letting the time pass by slowly.

